

DEFENCE

OF THE

Decree of the National Convention **OF FRANCE,**

For emancipating the SLAVES in the WEST INDIES.

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THOUGHTS on the IMPENDING INVASION OF ENGLAND,

AND

A DISCOURSE occasioned by the FACT.

WHATEVER may be the final issue of the French Revolution, or with whatever circumstances it may be accompanied, yet will one important consequence necessarily result: Every important principle of Government, of Morals, and of Social order will be brought in review before the public, and subjected to minute investigation, and in whatever obscurity the discussion may for a while be involved, yet, is there but little doubt, of its finally terminating in just and accurate views being extensively disseminated. As the endeavour to suppress the French Republic seems not to promise much success, we have the hope of seeing its effects brought to the fair test of actual experiment, which, like experiments in all other branches of knowledge, will tend to elucidate what theoretical disputants have hitherto confuted.

The West India slavery is one of the most interesting of those subjects, as well from its importance, as from its supposed difficulty. For a series of years it has engaged the unceasing attention of the several branches of our well balanced constitution; and to them, at least, it appears so extremely difficult to determine whether we shall still continue to murder and enslave the inhabitants of *Africa*, that like the inquiry of the ancient Philosopher into the nature of God; the difficulty seems to increase in proportion as we proceed in the inquiry.

Under such circumstances it might have been imagined, that we should have rejoiced to have seen a neighbouring nation bring a question which had so much puzzled us to an issue, and prove the comparative value of Slavery and Freedom as principles in actual operation, while we awaited the event to avail ourselves of the knowledge to be derived from their adventurous experiment.

If, as is generally supposed, the West India colonies be the foundation of the wealth and naval power both of France and England, and the emancipation of the Slaves would be the destruction of those colonies, then, surely it might be imagined we should exult, that those whom we choose to consider as our natural enemies have adopted a measure attended with such ruin to themselves; leaving this great source of wealth and power almost solely in our hands. If, as is supposed, emancipation would be injurious to the Negroes themselves, and that our Negroes are happy and contented in the state of Slavery, as is asserted, then, what a glorious triumph have the French Jacobins afforded us; destitute of cultivation or order, we should then see Freedom in the French Colonies, producing the predicted baneful effects: the Negroes must decrease from year to year, whilst in our Colonies they would increase in numbers and in happiness, under the kind protection of their owners: the dreadful mischiefs of Freedom could not then have been deemed imaginary, its fatal effects might have been then

appealed to, and have effectually silenced the despicable advocates of the Rights of Man.

How then shall we explain the abhorrence and contempt with which this Decree is viewed in the British Senate, where not one individual appears to defend it. Mr. Pitt who has been declaiming for years, that *"This Slavery was the most enormous calamity recorded in the History of the World, and was only called by that name for fraud, robbery and murder!"* now boldly comes forward and not only declares, that this determination of the French to terminate this system of fraud, robbery and murder, is weak, absurd and improvident; but proposes sending an Armament to bind those chains which have been broken, to enslave those who have been just made free. He will not even wait to see whether freedom will be attended with those baneful effects which have been predicted; with such abhorrence he contemplates the measure, that he will not even suffer the experiment to take place, though its injurious effects, if any, must be experienced by our enemies.

However extraordinary this may appear, yet can it excite no surprise in those who are acquainted with the nature and motives of the different parties, who have agitated this question amongst us. The long and delinatory harangues upon cruelty and injustice, the volumes of evidence, by which those charges have been brought home to our Colonists, have, indeed, occasioned many to suppose that some few individuals in the British Senate reprobated our Colonial Slavery, and were anxious to remove it; but, what do such French principle was ever for a single moment entertained. To secure, perpetuate and extend the Slave have been their sole objects, and the difference between the Abolitionists and their adversaries has merely been, how these valuable ends might be best obtained. Mr. Pitt and the other Abolitionists have contended that our Colonial Slavery was endangered by introducing Negroes from Africa, who, bred in the most ignorant of Freedom, disdaining the yoke of Slavery, would for ever resist the attempts to enslave them.

Colony, and wickedly endeavouring to obtain their freedom; he therefore proposed, that the importation of such dangerous Negroes should be prohibited, and that the Colonists, should be confined to the home manufacture of Slaves, and these being born and bred, would more patiently submit to chains and whips, to incessant labour and extreme hunger.

Mr. Dundas admitted the propriety and policy of this regulation, and hoped the proprietors of Slaves might at length see it in the same light; when it might be adopted, but that it would be an invasion of the rights and privileges of the Slave-holder to compel him to rear instead of purchase Slaves. Mr. Pitt then proved, that only four of our Islands needed supplies, that some were saturated with Slaves, consequently those latter might be converted into breeding pens for supplying those gentlemen in the other Islands, who might not choose to be at the trouble of rearing Slaves to supply the place of those whom they had murdered. To set this very troublesome question at rest, it was resolved, by one branch of our well balanced Government, that some time or other it might be expedient to adopt this notable regulation. But the Slave-holders, alarmed at this innovation on their liberties, appeared at the bar of the House of Lords, denied their right and power to circumscribe the *Slave-market*, and on this remonstrance, it has been deemed convenient to hang up this decisive question, peace be to its mane.

Thus, it appears, that the question so long agitated amongst us on the Slave Trade, was a mere Commercial Regulation for encouraging the home manufacture of Slaves, for opening a New Trade to Africa, which the former was supposed to prevent, and for giving permanency and security to a system of Slavery in our Colonies. The Abolitionists and the Anti-Slaveryists, indeed, both talked, and with equal propriety, about justice and humanity, but it was not the law, and the directly and earnest their business. The most eligible mode of increasing the Slave was the sole question, and so far was the Anti-

lition of Slavery from being intended, that Mr. Pitt's principal argument in favour of his plan was, that it secured Slavery from impending dangers.

Hence it appears, that the Abolition of Slavery, either gradual or immediate is a measure intirely French, to them belong all the infamy, or all the Honour. — Calumny itself cannot charge a single Member of the British Legislature with being so far contaminated with French Principles, as to propose restoring the Slaves in our Islands to the benefits of civil society, and the protection of its laws. An offer of consanguinity, so opposite to our whole system of conduct, that the remotest idea of it strikes us with horror. Nor can any Whig Politician, from Mr. Locke to the present time, be justly charged with adopting such a detestable principle, That liberty and happiness are to be confined to his foggy Island, is an Englishman's favourite idea, to spread mischief and desolation through the earth, is his most luxurious enjoyment,

The proceedings of the French and English governments, on this, and on all other subjects, are so perfectly dissimilar, that they may be excusable in avowing mutual abhorrence. Mr. Burke justly observes, in his preface to *Drissot*, That, "such is the nature of French principles, that they cannot be viewed with indifference; that it is a system which must be regarded with enthusiastic admiration, or with the highest degree of detestation, horror and resentment." On this question, at least, the two governments are fairly at issue; and he must, indeed, be an idiot who can admire both.

If the British government be just, then, indeed, the French deserve the epithets of robbers, and plunderers. They have at one blow annihilated a property of at least sixty millions sterling. But on the contrary, if these Slaves were not a property, and the French Decree has rescued a million of fellow-creatures from the hands of violence, placed them under the protection of the law, and restored them to the benefit of civil society; then have they

an immortal monument to their Fame. If we on the contrary, not merely strengthen the hands of violence, within our own jurisdiction, but engage in a crusade to bind a million of men, women and children, with an adamant yoke of slavery, in the very moment when it was broken; then let it be asked, whether any curse can await us, if any calamity can befall us, which we do not deserve?

Mr. Pitt, in reprobating this emancipating Decree, appears not to be at all desirous of censuring it as an insulated act. He tells us this *weak, absurd, improvident* proceeding flowed naturally from their general system, and was perfectly congenial with it. He considers it as a sample of their whole system; the whole then must be judged of by this selected portion: and we cannot defend this Decree, without being understood to have defended the whole system of French principles; and if any acts of the French government should be indefensible, such acts, and not this Decree, must be deemed anomalous.

As the French have only Decreed the general principle, that the Slaves should be emancipated, and have referred it to the Committee of Safety "*to take prudent measures to carry it into effect,*" so it must be understood that it is the general principle, that the Slaves should be emancipated, which Mr. Pitt stigmatizes, as *weak, absurd and improvident*. These terms cannot be applied to the mode of effecting this important purpose, as the mode has not as yet been determined on. Danton justly observes, "*This day you have done justice to humanity, but let us be the moderators of this wise Decree. Let us reflect that this passage so sudden from Slavery to Freedom, may be unfortunate, while we ought only to be desirous of making it useful. Let us, therefore, refer it to the Committee of General Safety, to adopt prudent measures to carry the Decree into execution.*" This conduct is, it seems, *absurd, weak and improvident*. Let us contrast it with our conduct, which is, to be sure, as *laudable* as that of the French is *deplorable*. The French have resolved, that a million of fellow-creatures shall be restored to

the benefit of society, and the protection of the laws. This is it seems, *weak and foolish*. We say they shall be considered as chattels, remain out of the protection of the law, subject to the will of their fellow subjects, to be treated as brutes; this is it seems quite *wise and laudable*. The French, having obtained liberty for themselves, are desirous of communicating its happiness to others; this is *absurd*. We make use of the power we derive from the liberty we enjoy to enslave others; this is perfectly *rational*. The French refer the subject to a Committee, to adopt *prudent* measures; this is *improvident*. We are for years agitating the subject of the West India Slavery, bringing the enormities of — before the public, without having the least intention of interfering in it; and even suffer the Planters to insult the Legislature, by declaring that it had no right to interfere between them and their Slaves, and that, if even it presumes to endeavour to prevent additional importations, they will set our laws at defiance, and the Colonial Judicatures shall trample them under foot. All this is perfectly *prudent*.

Presumptuous as it may be deemed to attempt a defence of this weak, absurd, improvident Decree, yet, alaa! I am implicated in the crime, and consequently necessitated to undertake its defence.— Long since did I presume to disseminate the detestable positions, That it was incumbent on us to endeavour “As speedy and effectual subversion of Slavery in our Islands, as the circumstances and situation of the Slaves would admit;” That “We should not limit our views to the abolition of the African Slave Trade, as the Slavery formed on it was equally unjust;” and “That the persons called Slaves in our Islands were intitled to liberty, by the common law of the land; that the mode of putting them in possession of their legal and natural right ought to be speedy and effectual, and ought to be considered with no other view but their happiness, however it might militate against the interest of their oppressors.”

Had the French been left in the undisturbed possession of that Freedom they had so gloriously obtained; had they been suffered quietly to pursue their wise and benevolent principles, little would this, or any of their other measures, have needed a defence from me. Their best and effectual defence, would have been the beneficial effects they would have produced. This was well known, and dreaded by those whose interest it was that those effects never should take place. To impede and obstruct their operation was the obvious policy to be adopted. France must be attacked, and filled with blood; and then the exclamation was to be bellowed forth, see the effects of French principles! so we may fill now the French West India Islands with carnage, and then possibly, we may have the audacity to exclaim, behold the effects of emancipation!

In defending this Decree, of the National Convention, I mean not to be guided by any supposed effects, either beneficial, or adverse, which may possibly result; for, notwithstanding the unmeaning clamour which Mr. *Burke*, has raised against abstract principles, I mean to contend, That "No circumstances, or situation, in society, can justify the subjecting a human being, as a property, to his fellow-creature; or the continuance of such a state, where it already exists;" and, in discussing this question, I mean not to be entangled with any particular principles of government, because, so far as the question of government is concerned, Slavery is equally inimical to all government. In whatever hands, or under whatever form, Government exists, it behoves to be Supreme over every individual; to that Supreme Authority he is to yield obedience, and to that he is to look for protection. Whenever one member of the community claims another as a property, this Supreme Authority, which is essential to government, is, in such case, so far subverted; both the Slave, and the Slave holder, as far as the relation exists between them cease to be amenable to the Supreme Authority. Hence, in proportion as we deem government to be

beneficial to society, we must consider Slavery to be injurious, and if a state of government be natural to man, a state of personal Slavery must be unnatural and subversive of social order.

Personal Slavery is as incompatible with a state of nature, as with a state of government. No circumstances can possibly exist, in such a state, from whence it can originate. *Locke* and many other writers have, indeed, endeavoured to support it: but it was on principles so absurd as to be now universally abandoned; and *Blackstone* has justly reprobated them.

But however indefensible the old principles of Slavery may be considered, yet, is it now attempted to be supported on grounds far more absurd. *Mr. Pitt* says, "In that unhappy situation in which our baneful conduct had brought both ourselves and them, it would not be justice on either side to give them liberty." *Mr. Pitt*, with a view to persuade us to abandon a particular species of the Slave Trade, has stigmatized the original seizure of the African as an atrocious robbery: but the Slave holder the Islands can perpetuate the robbery, retain the stolen goods without any crime; nay, he says, it would be injustice in him to relinquish them; an enormous sum is, it seems, cured by its continuance.

The unhappy African is seized in his native land, dragged hundreds of miles to the coast, carried to our islands, where he is condemned, under chains, and whips, to wear out the miserable remainder of his life. *Mr. Pitt* garbles this mass of enormity; some of the gang concerned in this transaction are, it seems, robbers, but others are honourable men. The wretched victim is transmitted from hand to hand: will *Mr. Pitt* inform us where, and at which transit, the criminality vanishes? is only the original seizure criminal? are all the purchasers in the different markets of Africa innocent? Is it a defence of the Planter that the injury is already perpetrated, and cannot be fully repaired, as the Slave cannot be returned to his family, from whence he was torn. the same defence

will apply to the Slave-dealer in Africa, who frequently is ignorant whence the Slave came, and equally unable to restore him.

It seems, then, that we have committed an injury; which we cannot fully repair, we have torn a fellow-creature from a country to which he never can return; murdered his wife who never can again solace his cares; deprived him of his children whom he never can again embrace; and, then, we make these irreparable injuries a plea for perpetrating and extending to his offspring, injuries which we can remedy. We deprive them of those enjoyments which tend to make liberty and life desirable, and thence we infer that we have a right to deprive them of liberty and life also. Mr. Pitt talks of the *unhappy* situation into which we have brought *them* and *ourselves*. The unhappy situation into which we have brought *them*, is, to be sure, pretty evident: but in the name of common sense, what can he mean by the unhappy situation into which *we* are brought? Is the Slave-holder *unhappy*, while his chariot rolls on sugar hogheads and rum puncheons? or are the numerous classes, who derive wealth and splendor from the Colonial Slavery, unhappy. The people at large do not seem to be unhappy, while enjoying the produce of robbery and murder; nor does Mr. Pitt appear to be very miserable, while, by swelling the revenue, trade, and navigation, of the nation, it enables him to carry on the war for exterminating French principles. Indeed, so extremely well satisfied are we with the unhappy situation, into which our *beneficial* conduct has brought both *them* and *ourselves*, that we are anxious to add to the half million, whom we have already brought into that unhappy situation, the million in the French Islands, whom the National Convention have resolved to extricate from it.

But it is pretended that we have so debased so brutalized them, by Slavery, that they are incapable of enjoying a state of freedom; and we continue to hold them in Slavery, from pure benevolence; and, from similar principles of benevolence, the Slave-dealer brings them from Africa, where he tells us

they are in a brutal state. It is a remarkable feature in the conduct of this inquiry, that both the Abolitionists, and Anti-abolitionists, have scarcely adduced any evidence but what, like *Hudibras'* arguments

directly tend,
Against the cause they would defend.

Thus the Slave-dealers themselves prove every circumstance, with which their adversaries had charged them: and they, in their turn, while contending for abolishing the African Slave Trade, and setting up a new manufacture of Slaves in our own Islands, proved decidedly the absurdity and futility of their plan, and that an Abolition of the Slavery in the islands is both practicable and absolutely indispensable. Fully satisfied of this, from the slender extracts which, from the voluminous evidence, has been laid before the public, by the society for abolishing the Slave Trade, I long since, wished to examine the evidence at large, with a view to elucidate this important point; but in vain have I endeavoured to obtain it. Too precious for the public eye, it is sedulously preserved among the parties who conduct this business.

Understanding that Mr. *Richard Phillips*, one of the Committee for abolishing the Slave Trade, had two copies, I presumed to solicit the loan of one of them for the purpose, but I was informed that he would furnish no materials to an *Adversary*.

Under these circumstances, I must be content with appealing to their own abstract, and even from thence appears the fitness of the Slaves for a state of freedom. In their own country, it appears, from the evidence of *Wadstrom*, *Storey*, *Towne*, *Dalrymple*, *Hall*, *Howe*, *Falconbridge*, and *Trotter*. That they are punctual, honest, hospitable, susceptible of all the social virtues, friendly; grateful, affectionate, skilful in manufactures, their capacities equal to the Europeans.—Mr. *Wadstrom* contends they surpass Europeans in affection; and Mr. *Newton* says, he found there the best people he ever met with.—That when they are brought among Europeans they are corrupted by their example, will not be disputed; and the alleg-

ing this corruption, as a plea for perpetuating their Slavery is a tolerable degree of effrontery. Yet even after we have brutalized them, as is pretended, they seem to possess a character to which the lower classes of the English can scarcely have a claim. *Giles* says, "Their capacity is good, and their disposition better than might be expected from persons so tutored." The Rev. Mr. *Rees* says, "They are as reasonable as any other beings, considering their education." Doctor *Harrison*, of Jamaica, thinks the abilities of the Negroes equal to our own, and their disposition much the same; that the Free Negroes are as industrious as the Whites, and that it is the Slavery which causes the unwillingness of the others. Doctor *Jackson*, of Jamaica, says, that after much knowledge of them, he could not perceive them at all inferior in capacity to unlettered White Men; that they possess many amiable qualities, charitable to all in distress, parents strongly attached to their children, and have given strong proofs of gratitude and attachment; often complain that they are an oppressed people, that they suffer in this world, but shall be happy in the next, and denounce the judgment of God on the White Men, their oppressors. *Coor*, of Jamaica, says, he always observed Negroes, who had grounds in good order, work with great pleasure. *Terry* says, that Free Negroes are as well behaved as others in the same rank of society. Capt. *Smith* always considered the Negroes as a keen, sensible, well disposed people; when their habits were not vitiated by cruel usage; has seen good usage produce a good effect. *Duncan*, of Antigua, says, that the capacities and dispositions of Negroes are much the same as the Whites; that those instructed by the Methodists were improved in their morals and behaviour. Captain *Lloyd* believed that Negroes might be induced to work without severity; and that a Mr. *Greenland* never punished his Slaves. Captain *Davison* says, Free Negroes are very industrious. Rev. Mr. *Stuart* says, the Blacks are not inferior to the Whites in abilities, and disposition; have much generosity,

fidelity, gratitude, understanding and ingenuity. The Rev. Mr. Davis says, that their feelings are much the same as Europeans. Cook says, the capacity of some Negroes are very great. Clappeson that the Free Negroes, in general behaved well. The Dean of Middleham says, their disposition is in general affectionate, where well treated. Woolrich says, the young Negroes learn trades as readily as the Whites; knows of no exceptions to their possessing the social affections as strongly as Whites, particularly the Creoles, their natural affections are as great as elsewhere.

Is it meant to insult the common sense of mankind, that such evidence as this is brought forward, by the very persons who insist that such a people as this are to be deemed as brutes, unworthy of the protection of the law, or of partaking of the benefits of civil society? Will Mr. Pitt favour us with a scale of intellectual powers, and intellectual cultivation, and by that scale let the West India Negroes, and our English Church and King Mob be judged; let those who rise to the given standard be deemed Free, and let those who are beneath it be adjudged Slaves?

After all the absurdity which has been circulated on this subject, will any one condescend to shew that any degree of intellectual cultivation is essential to place a man under the protection of the law, and constitute him a member of civil society? so far from it that, in proportion as he is deficient in both, it becomes more peculiarly necessary that he should receive the protection and be subject to the controul of civil society. Less capable of governing and protecting themselves, the laws of society should peculiarly be extended to protect them from injury; to suffer such to become subject to the arbitrary will of an individual is peculiarly criminal.

Is it the ordinary conduct of society to put out of the protection of the law, and subject to the arbitrary will of another, the ignorant and helpless? Is the infant, or the idiot abandoned to the arbitrary will of an individual? Let it be explained, how a state of personal Slavery can result from any particular pro-

tion of intellects, or degree of cultivation. Were a man to rescue an abandoned infant from destruction, nourish and rear it, would it become his property? If, then, a life saved, and benefits conferred, cannot constitute a property in man, shall it be deducted from injury? Shall we emasculate, or blind a fellow creature, and thence claim dominion over him, because we have degraded and sunk him in the scale of human being? Will not the maxim of law be applied, that "*No man shall profit of his own wrong*?" instead of the vengeance of society being averted, it shall be poured out on the culprit, and the injured shall claim reparation for the wrong, as far as it is repairable.

Indeed, no circumstances, whatever, can possibly authorise the making man a property of his fellow-man. From the special relation of the Father to the Child, and Husband to the Wife, peculiar authority results: but the law of society still preserves the supreme control, and limits the special authority within its necessary bounds, and in no well ordered society is it pretended, that even, the parental authority constitutes the child a property.

If, then, a property in man can result from no analogy in civil society, shall it be derived from the most wanton, and absurd pretexts? If it arises not from those high and special authorities, which are essential to society, shall it be suffered to exist where no relation subsists, but what is formed by violence and injustice? If the greatest of benefits cannot be a just foundation, shall it be derived from the grossest of injuries?

As this question has been agitated in a manner peculiarly adapted to perplex, and mislead; it is not surprising, that many confound an emancipation from Slavery with a dissolution of government; hence, they exclaim, what would the Negroes do, if left to themselves? True; but do the French mean to abandon them, to leave them to themselves? Does any one who proposes emancipation, mean emancipation from government? on the contrary, by destroying

the arbitrary dominion of the Slave holder, the Slaves would be brought immediately under the subjection as well as the protection of the law.

From their debased, their ignorant, their depraved state, results the strongest reason for their emancipation from the dominion of the Slave-holder, because such a dominion is the farthest removed from a state of regular, well administered government, and such a government becomes necessary in proportion as the governed are ignorant and debased. When the mind of man is improved by cultivation, principles of action arise, which in some degree, supply the place of government; a sense of honour, of shame, a regard for the good opinion of others, knowledge of the various relations of civil society, all come powerfully in aid of moral principle; and even that principle itself is so far improved in the cultivated mind, as greatly to aid, and in some degree perhaps to supersede the necessity, and obviate the imperfections of government; but, where the governed are base and ignorant, the moral principle is so far destroyed, and no spring of action remains but human laws; which, it then becomes more peculiarly necessary, should be uniform in their operations, constant in their application, strong in their administration, wise and just in their formation. The great defect in the system of Slavery is, that it is totally deficient in all these respects; the will of each Planter, or Overseer becomes varied and unstable law, arising not merely from the weakness and wickedness of the human mind, but from accident, caprice, removals, and anarchy: the control of the Planter, or Overseer is rarely exerted over the Slave, except as to those special circumstances and times in which his own interest is concerned; as to every other action of their lives, and their intercourse between each other, in which the master has no interest; he gives himself no concern. The Planters in their evidence, absurdly boast how much they leave the Slaves to their own management; nay, they tell us, that crimes which we deem capital, are suffered to pass with trivial or with no punishment. The

they ought to know that a weak, relaxed administration of Justice is the most detestable, and peculiarly so, when the governed are such as they describe their Slaves to be.

Mr. Pitt says, that a *Black* government is an idea sufficient to excite our horror. Why a *Black* government should not be as good as a *White* one, he does not condescend to inform us. If he means that persons in the state in which the Slaves are in our islands, are not ill qualified to form a government, he says, truly, and he may say the same, of the lowest classes amongst ourselves; but that no more proves, that the Negroes ought to be left in a state of Slavery, because they are not philosophers and politicians enough to form a government, than it does that our peasants ought to be made Slaves of, because they are not adequate to the task. — After having by our *baneful* conduct brought them to the unhappy situation in which they now are, it no more becomes us to abandon them without government, to anarchy and confusion among themselves, than it does to leave them without the protection of law to the wanton and lawless will of their oppressors. The French Decree does what it became us to do; deliver them from their oppressors, restore them to the protection of the law, and subject them to its control.

That there exist powerful motives for our not adopting a similar mode of conduct cannot be doubted by those who know the nature of our excellent constitution, and the powerful and extensive Colonial influence in the British Legislature. — Though Mr. Pitt, and even Mr. Dundas has admitted that the state of Slavery is injurious to the community, by diminishing the product of labour, yet is it not to be expected, that they should have the courage to pursue the public good, any more than the path of justice, in opposition to such a terrific power, but still, surely, it was not too much to expect that they should suffer that nation to adopt a different line of conduct, where no powerful, partial interest is suffered to obstruct the public good. — FINIS.